

ARTICLE

## The Practice of Ideals: Erich Honecker, Rudolf Bahro, and East Germany's Socialist Imaginary

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In July 1992, nearly two years after the demise of the German Democratic Republic (GDR/ East Germany), Erich Honecker, former general secretary of the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) was arrested in Berlin for his complicity in the murder of citizens fleeing his country. Yet his subsequent imprisonment brought forth unexpected help: former SED member Rudolf Bahro, who had been imprisoned by Honecker's regime a decade earlier for publishing a party-critical text, *Die Alternative*. Bahro wrote to his former jailer on August 17, ironically to offer support for his legal defense. Now, Bahro also expressed hope for a "human understanding ... about the substance of our undoubtedly still existing difference of opinion about the path of the GDR" and enclosed his recently published article connecting his support for Honecker with the GDR's founding ideals. In the article, Bahro rejected reducing East German history to the SED's abuses, arguing that "our impulse was conceived with the heart, and no such impulse is ever entirely lost." That impulse, for Bahro, ultimately emanated from antifascism, its entwined relationship with socialism on German soil, and those who fought for both. Though he acknowledged that "a German revolutionary continuity did not exist en masse" after the Nazi seizure of power in 1933, it did survive among the few socialists, like Honecker, who struggled against fascism and "rightly wanted a new German state" after 1945. For his role in building this alternative to capitalism, Bahro argued that Honecker should be allowed to retire in peace.<sup>1</sup>

This opened a brief correspondence and a mutual affirmation of ideals. Praising Bahro's "humanitarian ... thoughts and actions," Honecker fully agreed with his assessment of the GDR, explaining that "all endeavors are about making the Earth worth living in. This has not yet succeeded, and the GDR was only a draft for objective reasons. As it seems to me, in retrospect, not a bad one." Honecker then thanked Bahro for his good will and concluded that "it now comes down to professing oneself to the ideals of humanity."<sup>2</sup> Bahro replied a week later, glad that their "personal encounter" signaled "a reconciliation on the human level." Offering that his reasons for writing *Alternative* were a mix of "noble motives" and a desire to "sit in the posture of a would-be General Secretary," he posed questions that might elicit similar self-criticism from Honecker: "But weren't we too fearful and therefore power-focused in our design [of the GDR]? Wouldn't we have been able to save more in the end if we had risked more ... above all the open discussion of different perspectives leading to one goal?" Anticipating further disagreement, Bahro added that he was concerned instead with a closer understanding, "something much deeper, psychic," and concluded with a hope

<sup>1</sup> Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis (AGG) A (Bahro)/43/19, letter from Bahro to Honecker, August 17, 1992; and "Wenn Erich hiemkommt—oder von der Legitimität der DDR." See also Herzberg and Seifert, *Rudolf Bahro—Glaube an das Veränderbare*, 525–27.

<sup>2</sup> AGG A (Bahro)/43/19, letter from Honecker to Barao [sic], October 23, 1992.

that Honecker would keep his “faith” while in prison.<sup>3</sup> Honecker never replied to Bahro’s letter, but he steadfastly defended the GDR until his death.

This affirmative exchange between two antipodal East German socialists seemingly defies explanation, especially as Bahro wrote *Die Alternative* in part to excoriate the SED for failing to live up to its own ideals. Rather than abolishing inequality and exploitation, Bahro argued in the pages of *Alternative* that Honecker’s self-styled “real existing socialism” denied East Germans a role in substantive decision-making, reducing them to mere producers and consumers. Yet unlike other prominent Eastern European dissident works of the 1970s, *Alternative* was not a repudiation of socialism, but intended as a dialectical development of it.<sup>4</sup> Bahro called upon fellow reformers to organize a new grassroots movement, the League of Communists, to lead a “cultural revolution” that would overcome alienation and move socialism forward. Bahro certainly paid a heavy price for expressing his ideals: after publishing *Alternative* in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG/West Germany) in August 1977, he was dismissed from his job, expelled from the SED, arrested, and imprisoned.<sup>5</sup> Released on October 11, 1979, he emigrated to the FRG, all without public comment from the SED. Two weeks later, the party announced that Honecker would publish an autobiography through British media magnate Robert Maxwell.<sup>6</sup> Written by Honecker and SED researchers, *Aus meinem Leben* used Honecker’s life to reassert the SED’s interpretation of socialist ideals and the GDR. Published in 1980, the book lionized the German and Soviet workers’ movement, connecting its antifascist resistance before and during World War II to the SED’s construction of a socialist Germany after 1945. In the party’s view, the GDR stood as the embodiment and best practice of antifascist and socialist ideals, with economic growth and material prosperity as society’s “main task,” fulfilled by party and people united as a seamless whole. Throughout *Aus meinem Leben*, the SED made it clear that in the GDR, socialism was already real and existing.

Given the utopian impulse of both their texts and their lives, it was socialist ideals, and the society that imagined and practiced them, that brought Honecker and Bahro together again. Yet the significance of ideals extends well beyond this: examining the visionary “impulse” of the GDR rather than the abuses of the SED illuminates unexpected political relationships and practices, their underlying logic, and their ultimate impact on the lives of East German citizens. Consequently, this article argues that a distinctly socialist imaginary shaped both men’s ideals and practices; analyzing their development through and beyond the pages of *Die Alternative* and *Aus meinem Leben* not only explains their later reconciliation, but also the key role of ideals in shaping East German history more broadly.

The GDR would not exist as Honecker and Bahro knew it without a socialist imaginary preceding and suffusing it in practice, with ideals serving as both inspiration and benchmarks of progress. Generally, a *social* imaginary encompasses implicit social-historical understandings, or “background,” that provides a society with its languages, categories, and dispositions.<sup>7</sup> This also determines what is considered normal or normative, as well as prohibited, fantastical, or impossible—understandings that guide collective, instituting practices over time.<sup>8</sup> In the GDR, a *socialist* imaginary—encompassing the Marxist working-class movement, the Soviet experience, as well as German history and influences from the West and

<sup>3</sup> AGG A (Bahro)/43/19, letter from Bahro to Honecker, November 2, 1992.

<sup>4</sup> Leading antisocialist critics in the 1970s were Soviet author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Polish historian and journalist Adam Michnik, and the Charter 77 group in Czechoslovakia.

<sup>5</sup> Bahro’s termination letter stated that “your behavior has shown you are unwilling to meet the demands placed upon you,” despite having been awarded the title “Activist for Socialist Work” a few months prior. For his Activist for Socialist Work award, see AGG A (Bahro)/100/40.

<sup>6</sup> “Autor—Erich Honecker,” *Der Spiegel*, October 25, 1979, 284.

<sup>7</sup> Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987).

<sup>8</sup> Andreas Glaeser examines the discursive, emotive, and kinesthetic understandings that shaped individual and institutional actions, specifically Stasi officers and civil activists. See Andreas Glaeser, *Political Epistemics: The Secret Police, the Opposition, and the End of East German Socialism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

Global South—shaped individual subjectivities and the social institutions that are typically perceived as organizing practice. As the source of a society's ideals, a social imaginary also shapes the institutions intended to make those ideals real. Focusing on ideals, or a utopian state of being instituted through practice, offers a way to understand the intent, means, and goals of subjective and collective practices drawn from the imaginary. Social psychology research has examined the nexus of political beliefs and psychological needs, and how both can serve to justify a given social-political system and initiate a search for alternatives.<sup>9</sup> Rather than a fixed, coherent system of logical claims, this “ideology” is drawn from an imaginary of general understandings contingent on past and present social experiences, as well as shifting emotional interpretations of those experiences over time. These understandings can be utopian in their aims, based on a shared commitment to a better future for oneself and society, even if originating from disappointment with the status quo.<sup>10</sup> Honecker and Bahro exemplified this: in *Aus meinem Leben*, Honecker looked to continuous socialist success, whereas Bahro, in a press conference given upon his exile to the FRG, celebrated the hope he and others shared for a better future in the GDR and other socialist countries.<sup>11</sup>

Recent East German historiography has also laid the groundwork for such an analysis. While squarely challenging institutional histories of the GDR that view socialism as a cynical and illegitimate ideology with little social resonance, this article also seeks to integrate diverse social and cultural histories of the GDR to understand East German history as a social process more complex than totalitarian theory or descriptive taxonomies allow.<sup>12</sup> Franziska Becker and her collaborators have persuasively argued that the interplay of utopia and reality, subjectivity and collectivity, are indispensable to understanding the GDR. “Great socialist ideals” served both to legitimize the policies of the unelected SED, while also providing a normative vision to compare these policies against; creative utopianism could be measured by faith in the *potential* of socialism to be improved and reformed over time.<sup>13</sup> More recently, Katherine Pence and Paul Betts have introduced the concept of “socialist modernity” to recover aspects of East Germany’s “dashed ‘dreamworld,’” especially as a diverse society pursuing meaning within and beyond postwar consumerism.<sup>14</sup> This approach in turn inaugurated myriad studies of media, gender and sexuality, and consumer culture, as well a reexamination of party-state institutions.<sup>15</sup> A complex mosaic of East Germany’s socialist

<sup>9</sup> John T. Jost, Aaron C. Kay, and Hulda Thorisdottir, *Social and Psychological Bases of Ideology and System Justification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 6–7; see also John T. Jost, “The End of the End of Ideology,” *American Psychologist* 61, no. 7 (October 2006): 663.

<sup>10</sup> Vivienne Badaan, et al., “Imagining Better Societies: A Social Psychological Framework for the Study of Utopian Thinking and Collective Action,” *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 14, no. 4 (April 2020): 1–14. On the topic of disappointment, see Joachim C. Häberlen, *The Emotional Politics of the Alternative Left: West Germany, 1968–1984* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), and Belinda Davis, “Disappointment and the Emotion of Historical Law and Change,” in *Hoffnung-Scheitern-Weiterleben*, ed. Bernhard Gotto and Anna Ullrich (Oldenburg: De Gruyter, 2020), 87–108.

<sup>11</sup> AGG, A (Bahro)/18/5, “Text der einleitenden Worte von Rudolf Bahro auf der Pressekonferenz in Bonn, Hotel Bristol,” October 22, 1979.

<sup>12</sup> Sigrid Meuschel, *Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft in der DDR* (Frankfurt: Edition Suhrkamp, 1992); Klaus Schroeder, *Der SED-Staat. Partei, Staat und Gesellschaft 1949–1990*, (Munich: Hanser-Verlag, 1998), and Peter Grieder, *The German Democratic Republic*, (New York: Palgrave, 2012). Numerous observers and scholars have analyzed the GDR through various conceptual taxonomies. See Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 11.

<sup>13</sup> Franziska Becker, Ina Merkel, and Simone Tippach-Schneider, *Das Kollektiv bin ich: Utopie und Alltag in der DDR* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2000), 7–10.

<sup>14</sup> Katherine Pence and Paul Betts, ed., *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2007), 11–21.

<sup>15</sup> See Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Josie McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Heather L. Gumbert, *Envisioning Socialism: Television and the Cold War in the German Democratic Republic* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013); and Eli Rubin, *Amnesiopolis: Modernity, Space, and Memory in East*

modernity has emerged from this body of work. Yet it lacks systemic analyses of the common origins, goals, and limits of the GDR's socialist "dreamworld," as well as its capacity to inspire engagement with ideals specific, if not unique, to socialism itself.

Despite an enormous power difference, being from different generations, and holding antipodal positions over practice, Honecker and Bahro were both committed to the ideal of an antifascist and socialist Germany, and practiced this through institutions shaped by their socialist imaginary. Honecker (b. 1912) embraced socialism through his family background, activism in the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) during his youth, ten years of imprisonment during the Third Reich, and building what became the GDR following the Soviet occupation of Germany in 1945. Bahro (b. 1935) came of age in a society shaped by activists like Honecker, strongly identified with its antifascist and socialist ideals, and joined the SED at a young age. Although loyal to party leadership under Walter Ulbricht in the 1950s, both men came to oppose him in the 1960s, albeit for quite different reasons. Honecker rejected Ulbricht's economic reforms as a deviation from Marxism-Leninism, weakening the party's control over the planned economy while inviting unfavorable comparisons to the FRG. Bahro also rejected Ulbricht's reforms, but for their fetishization of growth and repression of democratization from below. Rather than accept this status quo, both men put their ideals into practice: Bahro resolved to publish a dialectical analysis of socialism after the Soviet suppression of the Prague Spring in 1968, and Honecker engineered Ulbricht's downfall in 1971. Yet when Honecker's leadership did not initiate the changes Bahro thought necessary, he published his *Alternative* to move socialism forward, despite the party. In response, the SED expelled him from the GDR, and offered Honecker's life and a utopian depiction of real existing socialism as an ineffectual riposte in the form of *Aus meinem Leben*.

Bahro's alternative did, however, inspire activists to challenge the party and renew the GDR. Assuming reform would begin from within the SED, Bahro intended his work to be read by likeminded socialists as the inspiration for a grassroots movement. Yet in the course of the 1980s, activist groups from the semi-autonomous Protestant Church answered Bahro's call to overcome the old through social transformation. These activists, including other expelled SED members that had remained in the GDR, exemplified the autonomous groups seeking social reform he outlined in *Alternative*, increasingly challenging the SED's authority through the 1980s and eventually leading the mass protests that forced Honecker's resignation as general secretary in October 1989. In the revolutionary months that followed, East Germans embarked upon an experiment in mass action and popular democracy, key aspects of Bahro's "cultural revolution." Although reunification with the FRG brought this experiment and the GDR to an end, the ideals connecting Honecker and Bahro ultimately proved stronger than the practices that once divided them: as their 1992 correspondence attests, the dissolution of the GDR did not signal the failure of socialist ideals in principle.

### **Unity—Antifascism, Socialism, and Coming of Age through the Socialist Imaginary**

Honecker and Bahro largely understood their lives through participation in the socialist movement, finding meaning in its ideals and potential to transform their subjectivity into communal purpose. Although this practice of situating one's experience into the broader sweep of socialism's historical mission has deep roots in the socialist imaginary, key

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*Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). For recent political studies, see Konstanze Körner, *Leistungsstile in der DDR. Ein Vergleich der Eliten in Partei, Industrie und Dienstleistungszweig 1971 bis 1989* (Berlin: Metropol, 2016); Tilman Pohlmann, *Die Ersten im Kreis. Herrschaftsstrukturen und Generationen in der SED* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017); and Inga Markovits, *Diener zweier Herren. DDR-Juristen zwischen Recht und Macht* (Berlin: Christopher Links Verlag, 2020).

differences in the two men's experiences foreshadowed their future rift.<sup>16</sup> As a KPD and anti-fascist activist in the 1930s, Honecker was immersed in the Marxism-Leninism of the USSR, and, after a humiliating decade in Nazi prisons, he sought to implement this practice of socialism without compromise in postwar Germany. These foundational experiences meant that Honecker held to a closed and rigid interpretation of Marxism-Leninism, which he practiced through his growing influence in the SED. Bahro, although coming of age in the society Honecker helped shape, and exposed to its antifascist-socialist imaginary from a young age, shared neither Honecker's travails nor his obstinacy. Instead, Bahro broadened his idealism through his education, by reading widely, writing poetry, and making contacts with older socialists—some at significant variance with the SED. Although both men recognized the SED as the GDR's ideal authority, and agreed with its practices throughout the 1950s, Bahro sought a deeper understanding of socialist history and its imaginary, and was more open to alternative interpretations and practices.

In *Aus meinem Leben*, Honecker characterized his life as a total commitment to a socialist cause greater than himself. Born into a socialist family in the industrial Saarland, he described his childhood as “difficult, though beautiful,” an experience of deep poverty tempered by family participation in the workers' movement. His father Wilhelm served as his first teacher, explaining “why the rich are rich and the poor are poor” and giving Honecker a “clear view of the world.”<sup>17</sup> Coming of age in the Weimar Republic, Honecker joined the KPD's youth wing, the Communist Youth Association of Germany (KJVD), emerging as “the spokesman of the Communists” among the Saarland youth movement.<sup>18</sup> In turn, the KPD leadership sent Honecker to the USSR for training at Moscow's International Lenin School from 1930 to 1931. This school gathered youths from across the world for immersion in Marxist-Leninist theory; despite never attending secondary school, Honecker received perfect grades for his work.<sup>19</sup> More significantly, he experienced a transference of his subjectivity to the socialist movement itself, adopting a new party alias and physically participating in the construction of Soviet socialism.<sup>20</sup> While working at the Lenin Metallurgical Works in the new city of Magnitogorsk, Honecker acknowledged the “unimaginably difficult” conditions workers faced. Yet in *Aus meinem Leben*, he reminisced how “at night, when the working noise subsided, songs were heard through the steppe—Russian folk songs mixed with the songs of revolution.”<sup>21</sup> After witnessing Marxism-Leninism forge a new collective identity and transform agrarian Russia into an industrial power, Honecker returned to Germany to do the same. At the 1931 Young Workers' Congress, he declared that German youth, “the oppressed of today, will be the judges of tomorrow.”<sup>22</sup>

Yet Honecker's imprisonment during the Third Reich challenged his fealty to Marxism-Leninism, a struggle omitted from the pages of *Aus meinem Leben*. With Hitler's rise to power in 1933, the KPD was outlawed and its activists driven underground. After two years of clandestine antifascist activism across Europe, Honecker was arrested by the Gestapo in 1935, tortured, tried and convicted, and confined to Brandenburg-Görden prison. In *Aus meinem Leben*, Honecker described his incarceration heroically, as a time of hard labor, organizing mutual aid with other KPD and KJVD activists, and staying abreast of

<sup>16</sup> Soviet scholars have examined subjectivity through the personal narratives of socialist activists, fashioning themselves through or against Marxism-Leninism. See Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), and Anatoly Pinsky, “The Diaristic Form and Subjectivity under Khrushchev,” *Slavic Review* 73, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 805–27.

<sup>17</sup> Erich Honecker, *Aus meinem Leben* (Berlin: Dietz, 1981), 7–9.

<sup>18</sup> Honecker, *Aus meinem Leben*, 25; emphasis in original.

<sup>19</sup> Bundesarchiv-SAPMO (BArch) NY 4167/8, “Charakteristik der ausgeführten Arbeiten.”

<sup>20</sup> Martin Sabrow, *Erich Honecker: Das Leben davor, 1912–1945* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2016), 63–78.

<sup>21</sup> Honecker, *Aus meinem Leben*, 43. For an account of conditions in Magnitogorsk, see Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

<sup>22</sup> BArch NY 4167/1, “Vorwärts, die junge Garde der Volksrevolution!...”



developments in the outside world, all in “appalling” sanitary conditions.<sup>23</sup> This account omitted his relative isolation, difficult relations with fellow prisoners, and repeated attempts to secure early release. Although Nazi authorities declared Honecker a “committed Communist functionary” who could not be trusted to avoid “state-destructive” activities upon release—a fact proudly included in *Aus meinem Leben*—by early 1945 he was transferred to a nearby women’s prison due to good behavior, where he was employed to repair damaged roofs.<sup>24</sup> Presented with the opportunity to escape, he absconded from a work detail to hide with a female guard, only returning later under unclear circumstances—all questionable actions missing from his autobiography. Escaping for good as the Red Army reached Berlin, Honecker made contact with KPD activists returning to from Moscow, under the leadership of future SED first secretary Walter Ulbricht.<sup>25</sup>

Despite his unsteady commitment to party discipline, Honecker played a key role in winning young people to the Soviet occupation zone’s “antifascist democratic order,” and eventually the Marxism-Leninism of the GDR. This was no easy task. Honecker observed in October 1945 that young Germans were disillusioned with politics, concerned instead with finding basic necessities and amusement.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless on February 26, 1946, he helped negotiate a merger of the youth wings of the KPD, SPD, Liberal Democrats, and Christian Democrats into the Free German Youth (FDJ), which in turn allied itself with the newly founded SED.<sup>27</sup> Honecker also facilitated contacts between young people and antifascists who could serve as reliable moral examples. In *Aus meinem Leben*, Honecker lauded Wilhelm Pieck, a longtime socialist and the SED’s co-chairman, who met regularly with young people to discuss their role in Germany’s socialist future.<sup>28</sup> Following the GDR’s foundation in October 1949, that future became reality, and the SED extended its practice of “democratic centralism” to state institutions and mass organizations like the FDJ. At the Third Party Congress in July 1950, the SED introduced its first five-year plan, established a Central Committee and Politburo, and named Ulbricht as first secretary. Honecker, as FDJ leader and a candidate member of the new Politburo, gave a brief speech, declaring that the GDR would create a “new state consciousness” by guiding young people to reject the neofascist capitalism of the FRG and embrace antifascist socialism. Together with the SED, the FDJ would provide youth with the necessary “ideological and organizational help” to ensure they would never again “die for the masters of Wall Street” or turn against their “liberator,” the USSR.<sup>29</sup> In effect, Honecker introduced the socialist imaginary, the practice of Marxism-Leninism, and the ideal of sublating the subjective with the collective to a new generation of Germans.

One member of that generation was Rudolf Bahro, who imbibed the GDR’s new state consciousness, albeit through a markedly different path than Honecker. Born in Bad Flinsberg in Silesia, he was nine years old when the Nazi government capitulated. After losing his mother and siblings to typhus later in 1945, Bahro and his father started anew in what became the GDR. Reflecting on his youth in 1982, Bahro admitted that he only reluctantly joined the FDJ in 1950, convinced to do so by one of his schoolteachers, likely a former Hitler Youth member.<sup>30</sup> Bahro recalled that this teacher “won me over by making it clear ... that there is a

<sup>23</sup> Honecker, *Aus meinem Leben*, 91–107.

<sup>24</sup> BArch NY 4167/17, “Betrifft: Gnadensache Erich Honecker ... [sic],” November 13, 1942. See also Sabrow, *Erich Honecker*, 346–54.

<sup>25</sup> Sabrow, *Erich Honecker*, 392–403.

<sup>26</sup> Alan McDougall, “A Duty to Forget? The ‘Hitler Youth Generation’ and the Transition from Nazism to Communism in Postwar East Germany, c. 1945–49,” *German History* 26, no. 1 (2008): 28. See also Honecker, *Aus meinem Leben*, 115.

<sup>27</sup> Honecker, *Aus meinem Leben*, 131–32.

<sup>28</sup> Honecker, *Aus meinem Leben*, 128–29.

<sup>29</sup> BArch DY 30/40017, “Stenographische Niederschrift des III. Parteitag der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands vom 20.–24. Juli 1950,” 391–97.

<sup>30</sup> Rudolf Bahro, *From Red to Green: Interviews with New Left Review*, trans. Gus Fagan and Richard Hurst (London: Verso, 1984), 6–13.

power structure in the GDR, that people are being oppressed there” and that “the sincerity of this statement was decisive for me to begin to grapple with Marxism.” Bahro joined the SED as a candidate member in 1952, and as an excellent student and a voracious reader, immersed himself in the narratives and ideals of the socialist imaginary. Required to read Stalin’s interpretation of Marxism-Leninism, the *Short Course*, in school, he also read Marx and Lenin, along with classical German works and socialist realist literature.<sup>31</sup> At the age of twenty-five, he even published a collection of poetry influenced by leading GDR poets Johannes R. Becher and Bertolt Brecht. In a poem about the Fifth Party Congress in 1958, Bahro largely echoed ham-fisted SED exhortations.<sup>32</sup> However, in a poem addressed to his fellow Humboldt University students, Bahro tacitly acknowledged that they did not share his ideals: “I know, my friends, the red [*das Rot*] gets on your nerves.” But he challenged his peers to reach beyond their subjective concerns, reminding them that “Marx is with us” and “in us arises Lenin’s breath, setting the serenity of silent dreamers alight.”<sup>33</sup> For Bahro, socialism’s deepest inspiration was its call to subjectively identify with a collective historical purpose—a conviction he ultimately shared with Honecker.

Yet in addition to immersing himself in a more expansive socialist imaginary, Bahro’s education allowed him to engage with a wider breadth of socialist and antifascist activists. Bahro shared Honecker’s admiration for SED leaders, including Pieck and former Social Democrat Otto Grotewohl, activists who were, in Bahro’s view, “truly exceptional people” and “widely accepted by the masses” in a way that neither Ulbricht nor Honecker achieved.<sup>34</sup> Yet Bahro also interacted with older activists during his philosophy studies at Humboldt: he later recalled that through the stories of former members of the KPD and the KPD opposition, as well as Socialist Worker Party (SAPD) and left-wing SPD members, “one could relive the most varied splintering of the workers’ party history in Germany in the 1920s ... and ... the history of the Russian Revolution” itself.<sup>35</sup> These interactions both affirmed his commitment to antifascist socialism and expanded his awareness of the socialist imaginary beyond Marxism-Leninism. Bahro also formed a lasting friendship with Rudi Wetzel (b. 1909), a veteran KPD member and journalist who ran afoul of the SED in the 1950s for his criticism of Ulbricht; Wetzel would later be Bahro’s closest collaborator in writing and publishing *Alternative*.<sup>36</sup> These interactions with socialists at variance with the SED also likely illustrated to the young Bahro that dissent from the party could also be compatible with one’s faith in socialism.

In the 1950s, Honecker emerged as a Marxist-Leninist stalwart, while Bahro exhibited a willingness to question authority if necessary; nevertheless, both men found their socialist ideals reflected in party practices. Bahro believed, like many SED members, that the workers’ uprising across the GDR in June 1953 was instigated by fascist West German agents.<sup>37</sup> Honecker felt the same: after the uprising, he even supported Ulbricht when less dogmatic Politburo members attempted to depose him. Following Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin at the XX CPSU Congress in 1956, Bahro noted how Ulbricht simply declared that Stalin was no longer a “philosopher of importance,” but otherwise took little interest. Approving of the Soviet intervention in Hungary later that year, Bahro circulated a short essay asking for the SED’s official explanation of the issue. And though he participated

<sup>31</sup> AGG A (Bahro)/18/5, letter from Bahro to Svante Weyler, April 2, 1980, 2–3.

<sup>32</sup> Rudolf Bahro, *In dieser Richtung* (Berlin: Volk und Welt, 1960), 20–21.

<sup>33</sup> Bahro, *In dieser Richtung*, 11.

<sup>34</sup> Bahro, *From Red to Green*, 48.

<sup>35</sup> AGG A (Bahro)/18/5, letter from Bahro to Svante Weyler, April 2, 1980, 5–6. The SAPD or SAP was a left-socialist Marxist Party formed in 1931 after breaking away from the SPD. From its foundation the SAMP strongly advocated for a united antifascist front, including the KPD, SPD, trade unions, and smaller socialist groups.

<sup>36</sup> AGG A (Bahro)/25/8, letter from Bahro to Sergio Segre, January 8, 1980. For an account of Wetzel’s life, see Michael F. Scholz, *Skandinavische Erfahrungen erwünscht?: Nachexil und Remigration. Die ehemaligen KPD-Emigranten in Skandinavien und ihr weiteres Schicksal in der SBZ/DDR* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2000).

<sup>37</sup> Bahro, *From Red to Green*, 16.

in discussions with other students about ousting Ulbricht, he later supported the removal of Ulbricht's last Politburo opponents in 1957.<sup>38</sup> Honecker was instrumental in this purge, publicly denouncing his former comrades at the time.<sup>39</sup> He recalled rather prosaically in *Aus meinem Leben* that the dismissals were an "unavoidable settling of accounts," fully justified in order to achieve "the Marxist-Leninist unity of our party" at a time of high tensions with the West over the status of Berlin.<sup>40</sup>

### Is the Party Always Right?—Conflicts over Reform in the 1960s

If Ulbricht's practice of Marxism-Leninism largely united Bahro and Honecker in the 1950s, they both broke with the party leadership during the 1960s, albeit for quite different reasons. This growing divergence centered upon Ulbricht's New Economic System (NES), an economic reform program that sought to integrate and decentralize the GDR's centrally planned economy to overtake Western levels of prosperity. Honecker quickly deemed these reforms dangerous to his rigid interpretation of Marxism-Leninism, believing that they exposed the GDR to unfavorable comparison to the FRG. Bahro, however, rejected the reforms for their lack of openness and revolutionary potential, declaring the NES merely a technocratic solution to lagging economic growth. Following the suppression of the Prague Spring in 1968, Bahro broke with the party, pledging to write a dialectical development of socialism practiced in the USSR and East Germany. A few years later, Honecker deposed Ulbricht. As the SED's new leader, he reasserted central planning, sharply demarcated the GDR from the FRG, and expanded social welfare and consumer goods production. These divergent interpretations of socialist best practice formed the basis of the "cultural revolution" and "real existing socialism" outlined in their later texts.

Ulbricht's metasystemic reforms began with attaining sovereignty over the GDR's borders, leading to the construction of the Berlin Wall—an act that Bahro and Honecker fully supported. After persuading Khrushchev to agree to close the Berlin border, Ulbricht instructed local party-state leaders to prepare for disruptions in trade and production and tasked Honecker with overseeing the operation in Berlin.<sup>41</sup> Honecker stood by this action in *Aus meinem Leben*, proud of the symbolic and technical achievement of making the GDR "free from disturbances," as it was described at the time.<sup>42</sup> Despite the tragedy of separating families and friends, the new "antifascist protection barrier" ended the rising emigration of hundreds of thousands of East German workers into West Berlin and prevented Western spies and "saboteurs" from entering the GDR. For these reasons, Bahro also supported the action: "I didn't myself think that something so drastic and semi-military as a wall would be put up," he recalled, "but once it was there, I completely approved."<sup>43</sup> Having solved its emigration problem, the SED could now embark upon reforms without threatening the stability of its rule.

The closing of the Berlin border allowed Ulbricht to initiate the NES, a major reform in planning that drew on advances in cybernetics, prognostics, and information technology to conceptualize socialism as a rationalized and integrated productive metasystem. Following its introduction at the Sixth Party Congress in January 1963, Ulbricht presented the full program at a conference later that month.<sup>44</sup> In a multi-hour speech, he explained that the NES

<sup>38</sup> Bahro, *From Red to Green*, 25–27.

<sup>39</sup> BArch DY 30/2059, "Manuskript des Berichtes des Politbüros an die 35. Tagung des ZK der SED," February 3–6, 1958, 81–90.

<sup>40</sup> Honecker, *Aus meinem Leben*, 193.

<sup>41</sup> Hope Harrison, *Driving the Soviets up the Wall: Soviet-East German Relations, 1953–1961* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 100–01.

<sup>42</sup> Honecker, *Aus meinem Leben*, 205.

<sup>43</sup> Bahro, *From Red to Green*, 36–37.

<sup>44</sup> BArch DY 30/80327, "Richtlinie für die Planung und Leitung der Volkswirtschaft/Kritische Einschätzung des bisherigen Systems der Planung und Leitung der Volkswirtschaft," June 11–12, 1963.



hoped to achieve greater productivity by incentivizing profits, rationalizing prices, and streamlining management structures. Ulbricht also called for creating specialist groups in every factory to implement and innovate upon these tasks.<sup>45</sup> Yet the NES quickly encountered difficulties: by August 1963, planners found that incoming reports were “so different in quality that they cannot be used as a basis for management treatment.”<sup>46</sup> Although planners strove to streamline information exchange between local producers and central authorities, this cycle of assessment, application, and reassessment would plague the NES throughout the decade. Conceiving of the GDR as an abstract cybernetic metasystem also underestimated the potential for disruptions, especially from skeptics like Honecker, who interpreted the NES as a dangerous deviation from the centrally planned, gross production industrial practices he witnessed first at Magnitogorsk.

Despite Honecker’s and Ulbricht’s basic agreement on the ideal of economic growth, by the mid-1960s the two disagreed sharply over planning practices. In January 1966, the Eleventh Plenum of the party’s Central Committee convened, in part, to discuss the progress of NES, and the divisions it had caused within the party. Introducing the second phase of the reforms, Ulbricht also chided his colleagues that although “the party embraces the new, and learns [from it],” certain party members were “not learning energetically and consistently enough.” While assuring that technological imports would be made “safe for socialism,” Ulbricht’s call for more trade with capitalist countries did little to convince skeptics like Honecker.<sup>47</sup> In his speech at the plenum, Honecker’s criticisms of recent cultural deviations indirectly applied to the NES as well. Although refraining from attacking Ulbricht, he warned of the GDR losing its socialist moral character in competing with the FRG, adding that ideological “skepticism and rising living standards ... are mutually exclusive.” Honecker reminded his listeners that a “developed Marxist-Leninist level of thinking is the prerequisite for a deep understanding of the problems of ideal and reality, partisanship and truth, and the beauty and seriousness of our struggle.”<sup>48</sup> In this view, the GDR was to be sharply contrasted with, and separate from, the capitalist world. Anything less was a betrayal of international class struggle.

For Bahro, the ideal of state-led growth, either through a Marxist-Leninist planned economy or a decentralized metasystem, held little meaning if not accompanied by social reform—a view he shared openly in his professional life. By the early 1960s, he had found work in Berlin at the union representing scientists and university staff. Yet through discussions of party practices, Bahro recalled that he realized the SED was actually “two parties,” comprising “conformist” and “reformist” wings. Identifying fully with the latter, in a meeting with SED propaganda chief Kurt Hager, he expressed his views “a little too freely” and was transferred to a less significant position at the union. He persisted in advocating for reform, and in 1965 quit the union to work as an editor at the FDJ’s magazine, *Forum*. This seemed initially to be a good fit: a 1963 “youth communique,” sanctioned by Ulbricht, had encouraged young people to make their voices heard in public. In response, *Forum* had allowed for more robust and critical cultural discussions. Yet after Honecker’s remarks at the Eleventh Plenum—with which Bahro “completely disagreed”—the journal retreated from its more open course. After Bahro published his own essay criticizing conformity in the party, he was dismissed from his editorship, signaling that the reforms would only go so far.<sup>49</sup> Bahro later recalled of the NES that “apart from a move towards a technocratic orientation, occasioned by the development of productive forces on an international scale, it didn’t intend to introduce anything new.”<sup>50</sup> Ulbricht’s reach for an integrated,

<sup>45</sup> Walter Ulbricht, *Zum neuen ökonomischen System der Planung und Leitung* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1966), 204.

<sup>46</sup> BArch DF 4/1697, “Betr.: Auswertung der Wirtschaftskonferenz,” August 12, 1963.

<sup>47</sup> Ulbricht, *Zum neuen ökonomischen System der Planung und Leitung*, 677.

<sup>48</sup> Andreas Herbst et al., eds., *Die SED. Geschichte, Organisation, Politik. Ein Handbuch*, (Berlin: Dietz, 1997), 685.

<sup>49</sup> Bahro, *From Red to Green*, 38–41; see also Rudolf Bahro, “Rudolf Bahro Interviews Himself,” *The Socialist Register* 15 (1978): 11–12; the interview was translated by Paul Edmunson and Gunter Mimmerup.

<sup>50</sup> Bahro, “Rudolf Bahro Interviews Himself,” 11, 15–16.

rationalized, and prosperous GDR was, for Bahro, ultimately about competition with the West rather than meaningful progress at home.

Although Bahro's view of the NES underestimated its transformational potential, this was not lost on Honecker and other party conservatives, who increased their criticisms of the program's seeming deviation from Marxism-Leninism. Consequently, Ulbricht rebranded the intended third phase of the NES as the Economic System of Socialism (ESS), introducing the reforms at the Seventh Party Congress in April 1967. Ulbricht reaffirmed the centrality of competition with West Germany, vowing to "overtake without catching up" the FRG's growth and standard of living through a distinctly socialist path. To do so, the ESS redefined socialism not as a short transitional stage between capitalism and communism, "but a relatively independent socioeconomic formation ... on a world scale."<sup>51</sup> Officially approved but privately disparaged by SED conservatives and the new Soviet leadership under Leonid Brezhnev, this "developed social system of socialism" rethought basic Marxist-Leninist temporality, approximating socialism to a new mode of production.<sup>52</sup> Consequently, the ESS went beyond economic growth, calling for an "organic connection" between planning and "basic questions of the overall social process," encompassing the "largely independent activity" of producers as well as "the independent design of social life" across the GDR.<sup>53</sup> Incorporating "structural policy" (*Strukturpolitik*), which conceptualized information and resource distribution as a decentralized, yet integrated, national and international system, the ESS also drew upon the discipline of prognostics in its long-term planning, to "not only tell us what will be at what time, but above all: what must be."<sup>54</sup> Taken together, this practice of ideals saw the GDR as a plannable metasystem integrated into the world market, albeit as the visionary edge of humanity's greater progress to communism.

The ESS also failed to satisfy Bahro. Instead, he pressed forward with yet more radical criticisms of party practices. Following his dismissal from *Forum*, he found a new position at a Berlin rubber factory, working on a specialist advisory committee as established by Ulbricht through the NES. Popular at his job, Bahro also gained a reputation for being politically naive and "crazy," even comparing himself to Lenin while intoxicated. Bahro also shared his criticisms with Ulbricht himself, writing him a letter in December 1967 that called for a "combination of centralized control and mass democracy." The reply came in May 1968, at the height of the Prague Spring, as a personal visit from a Central Committee economics department representative. Although he flatly told Bahro that his ideals were "already part of official policy," the two discussed the Czechoslovak reform movement for the next three hours. When Bahro's interlocutor finally left, he warned that "if you go on like this, there will be an unholy row with the Party."<sup>55</sup> Unmoved, Bahro placed his hopes in the reformers. When Warsaw Pact forces invaded Czechoslovakia in August 1968 and put an end to their reforms, Bahro resolved to pen a grassroots criticism of the repressive "politbureaucracies" in the GDR and USSR, "in blunt language without reservations."<sup>56</sup>

<sup>51</sup> BArch DY 3023/435, "Wesen und Hauptbestandteile des ökonomischen Systems des Sozialismus...", 14.

<sup>52</sup> Peter Grieder, *The East German Leadership 1946–1971: Conflict and Crisis* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), 166. Bahro derided this innovation in *Alternative* for its "cowardly" introduction but acknowledged its tacit recognition that contemporary socialism did not resemble what Marx had foreseen. See Rudolf Bahro, *Die Alternative. Zur Kritik des real existierenden Sozialismus* (Cologne: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1977), 19–20.

<sup>53</sup> BArch DY 3023/435, "Wesen und Hauptbestandteile...", 14.

<sup>54</sup> BArch DY 30/87188, "Bisherige Ergebnisse bei der Erfüllung des Forschungsauftrages 'Die Gestalt und der Prognose zu einem echten Führungsinstrument,'" July 6, 1967.

<sup>55</sup> Bahro, *From Red to Green*, 49–52.

<sup>56</sup> Bahro, *From Red to Green*, 62–63. Bahro also worked on a dissertation for the Carl Schorlemmer Technical School on industrial management. Conducting extensive interviews for this project, his dissertation called for greater local managerial control and creativity. Although rejected due to Stasi interference, the dissertation was later published in the West. See Rudolf Bahro, *Plädoyer für schöpferische Initiative. Zur Kritik von Arbeitsbedingungen im real existierenden Sozialismus* (Cologne: Bund-Verlag, 1980). For an account of the writing and rejection of the dissertation, see Guntolf Herzberg and Kurt Seifert, *Rudolf Bahro—Glaube an das Veränderbare. Eine Biographie* (Berlin: Christopher Links Verlag, 2002), 118–32.

The end of the Prague Spring also signaled an end of the ideal of reform in the socialist world. The ESS was discredited through its association with Czechoslovak economic policies, which in turn quashed similar reforms in the USSR.<sup>57</sup> Ulbricht's anxiety over his eroding authority likely contributed to his pressing for overly ambitious yearly plans for 1969 and 1970. Yet by mid-1969, a State Planning Commission reassessment of ESS reduced neither its reliance on metasystemic concepts nor its emphasis on decentralization, leading to growing anxieties among party conservatives.<sup>58</sup> Moreover Ulbricht, unlike the rest of the Politburo, had welcomed the October election of a new SPD government under Chancellor Willy Brandt, hoping for top-level rapprochement with the FRG and a more integrated relationship between the two states.<sup>59</sup> The FRG government readily agreed, leading to direct meetings with Prime Minister Willi Stoph in the GDR in March 1970, and in the FRG in May. Faced additionally with reductions in Soviet raw material support, Ulbricht even turned to Western loans to ameliorate these shortfalls.<sup>60</sup> These actions aroused Brezhnev's fears of a German-German "special relationship" that Honecker exploited, positioning himself as a hardline Marxist-Leninist alternative to Ulbricht.<sup>61</sup>

Honecker successfully ousted Ulbricht in 1971. He replaced the ESS with his own practice of Marxism-Leninism, one that would deliver social welfare and consumer goods to East Germans while sharply differentiating the GDR from the FRG. At the Eighth Party Congress in June 1971, Honecker introduced his "unity of social and economic policy," a reassertion of central planning that prioritized consumer goods production and housing construction.<sup>62</sup> Honecker also pressed for a return to Marxist-Leninist "principles and methodology" in the party's theoretical-ideological work and to explain these ideals and practices "in a language clearly understandable to the masses."<sup>63</sup> In equating his policy with tangible measures of prosperity, Honecker signaled his rejection of Ulbricht's integrated metasystemic utopia. Honecker later declared a new path of "delineation" (*Abgrenzung*) that asserted the GDR's socialist identity beyond any unfavorable comparison with the FRG. The GDR would reach communism firmly from the standpoint of Marxism-Leninism, allied with the USSR and behind its fortified borders.

### Dialectical Divergence—Real Existing Socialism and Its Alternative

Honecker's real existing socialism thus took shape as a conservative reaction to the NES/ESS. Although he first used the phrase "real existing socialism" at the end of a long speech in May 1973, it nevertheless rose to prominence thereafter, coming to express Marxist-Leninist practice in the USSR and Soviet-allied countries from the 1970s onward.<sup>64</sup> Bahro sought to dialectically sublimate this ideal practice in *Alternative*. Though rejecting the SED's growth-first ideal and its practice under Honecker, Bahro recognized real existing socialism's pragmatism, acknowledging that only Ulbricht held to the illusion that the GDR could overtake the FRG.<sup>65</sup> Yet this pragmatism also tacitly admitted a lack of new ideals and practices. For Bahro, real existing socialism existed "to justify the contrast between what Marx and Lenin

<sup>57</sup> Monika Kaiser, *Machtwechsel von Ulbricht zu Honecker. Funktionsmechanismen der SED-Diktatur in Konfliktsituationen 1962 bis 1972* (Berlin: Akademie, 1997), 284–301.

<sup>58</sup> BArch DY 3023/429, "Der Hauptinhalt der Maßnahmen zur Gestaltung des ökonomischen Systems des Sozialismus in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik," May 13, 1969.

<sup>59</sup> Grieder, *The East German Leadership 1946–1971*, 177.

<sup>60</sup> Jeffrey Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline in East Germany, 1945–1989*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 68–69.

<sup>61</sup> Grieder, *The East German Leadership 1946–1971*, 178–83.

<sup>62</sup> Zentralkomitee der SED, *Bericht des Zentralkomitees an den VIII. Parteitag der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (Berlin: Dietz, 1971), 38–42.

<sup>63</sup> Zentralkomitee der SED, *Bericht des Zentralkomitees an den VIII*, 93.

<sup>64</sup> BArch DY 30/2085, "Bericht des Politbüros an die 9. Tagung des ZK," May 28–29, 1973, 146.

<sup>65</sup> Bahro, *From Red to Green*, 192.

had said and what had actually developed,” a reality that caused widespread disappointment within the party, contrasting sharply with what he saw as the idealism and dynamism of the 1950s.<sup>66</sup> Bahro also had to resist this pessimism in his own work: Although a 1973 outline of *Alternative* included the heading “the idea isn’t true against practice,” he resisted posing the two as antipodes, or rejecting Honecker’s position outright.<sup>67</sup> Rather, he accepted real existing socialism as a stage in the progression toward the ultimate ideal of communism and simply outlined what should follow. Once published, his *Alternative* caused a sensation in the FRG and GDR, leading to Bahro’s imprisonment and exile. Although the SED did not acknowledge his work, what became *Aus meinem Leben* refuted Bahro’s proposed dialectical development and reasserted real existing socialism as the definitive practice of ideals in the GDR.

Drawing on his broad understanding of the socialist imaginary, Bahro analyzed socialist history to contextualize real existing socialism and form a dialectical development of it. *Alternative* thus began with a reimagining of the October Revolution, the formation of the USSR under Stalin, and how these factors led to real existing socialism. Although accepting its success in breaking with capitalism, Bahro argued that the USSR did not undergo a proletarian revolution, but rather a rapid industrialization of a “predominantly precapitalist country” along “noncapitalist” lines.<sup>68</sup> Rather than socialism, the USSR represented Marx’s “Asiatic mode of production,” a subtype of “primitive” production wherein “the original common property of village communities was not dissolved in private ownership, but was de facto nationalized.”<sup>69</sup> This nationalization required a strong, despotic party-state coming to power through popular revolution.<sup>70</sup> The resulting system of ownership, in which all social funds and products were collectively owned through the party-state, formed the development of the USSR under Stalin. For Bahro, Honecker’s experience at Magnitogorsk signified a practice that organized and industrialized the USSR, and through its application by the SED formed the basis of real existing socialism.<sup>71</sup> Yet this mode of production was at best anachronistic in an already advanced industrial society like the GDR and required further development.<sup>72</sup>

In Bahro’s analysis, the SED bureaucracy stifled the next stage of socialist history by fixating upon economic growth as the legitimization of its own rule. Bahro argued that despite creating relative economic equality, the ongoing division of labor and dominance of the party bureaucracy had created a “subaltern mentality” among workers routinely denied access to political and economic decision-making.<sup>73</sup> Instead, GDR citizens were given myriad consumer goods, a practice that Bahro found cynical and absurd: he criticized calls for overtime shifts to meet growing demands for clothes, “even as our wardrobes are bursting,” and lamented how such goods “do not drive personality development,” but instead compensated for a lack of opportunities for the “enjoyment of actions, enjoyment of relationships, [and] concrete life in the broadest sense.”<sup>74</sup> Bahro saw no difference between capitalist and socialist growth in this respect, as both would prefer an “exodus from this solar system” to “a bold

<sup>66</sup> Bahro, *From Red to Green*, 47; and Bahro, *Die Alternative*, 407–08. Bahro later affirmed this in interviews, expressing the shame with which party members wore their SED lapel pins in public by the 1970s. See Bahro, “Rudolf Bahro Interviews Himself,” 17–18.

<sup>67</sup> AGG A (Bahro)/91/37, leather booklet/notes for *Alternative*, 1973.

<sup>68</sup> Bahro, *Die Alternative*, 58; see also Bahro, *From Red to Green*, 60.

<sup>69</sup> Bahro, *Die Alternative*, 80–81. This racially essentializing concept has deep roots in the socialist imaginary. In the *Grundrisse* (1858), Marx described the “Asiatic mode of production” as a group of small communes living under the protection and control of a despot, who in turn takes a share of their communal product. See Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Random House, 1973), 473–74.

<sup>70</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 69.

<sup>71</sup> Marxist-turned-anticommunist Kurt Wittfogel draws similar parallels between the “Asiatic mode of production” and the Stalinist USSR; see Kurt Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957). Bahro was influenced by Wittfogel’s thesis; see Bahro, *From Red to Green*, 41.

<sup>72</sup> Bahro, *From Red to Green*, 114.

<sup>73</sup> Bahro, *From Red to Green*, 167.

<sup>74</sup> Bahro, *From Red to Green*, 318–19, 484–85.

reorganization of human existence on earth.”<sup>75</sup> This reorganization would begin on the basis of existing “economic emancipation” in order to reach a higher “cultural emancipation” facilitated by hitherto untapped surplus consciousness in a population accustomed to dull, routine work.<sup>76</sup> Rather than Marxist-Leninist class struggle, this “cultural revolution” would welcome all to join as equals in imagining and practicing the next stage of history.<sup>77</sup>

Bahro also concluded that reformists within the party bureaucracy would lead this revolution. He assumed that disaffected SED members would be the first to advocate for reform because seeing their ideals thwarted by “realpolitik” for so long would create the impulse to act: “Why function for twenty, thirty years further without inspiration, in a system that no longer gives sustenance to one’s own hopes and ideals?” Bahro predicted that such activists would slowly coalesce as a “theoretical-ideological and propaganda circle” to “familiarize the majority of those politically interested in socialism, inside and outside the party, with the idea of an alternative.”<sup>78</sup> This reform movement would proceed dialectically as well, emerging from within the existing party as a “negation of the negation,” to renew its revolutionary potential. This split would be directed specifically against the bureaucracy, and the “opposition appears from the outset with the assertion that the ruling party oligarchy has vacated the position of emancipatory interests, so that they no longer have any political representation. The position is vacant!”<sup>79</sup> Or, in abandoning its own ideals and refusing society’s participation in its own leadership, Bahro argued that the SED had ceded its ideal authority to reformers. It was simply their responsibility to claim and use it.

To do so, Bahro’s “cultural revolution” would follow the socialist imaginary’s ideal of subjectivity dedicated to a collective historical mission. A new League of Communists was to embody this mission’s dialectical movement as “the reflection of the whole of society, its consciousness of all social problems of development, and who in itself anticipates something of the human progress for which it works.” Although abdicating repressive measures, participation in the cultural revolution would require criticism and self-criticism, for without “the dialectical thought-structures which reflect the contradictory course of history, progress is no longer possible.” In accordance with stable economic production, individuals would practice an “asceticism” regarding “the satisfaction of one’s own immediate needs” as a precondition to truly “thinking like a communist.” All would subjectively eschew material wealth to facilitate collective emancipation.<sup>80</sup> With less emphasis on productivity and material growth, emancipation would be achieved through the democratization of labor, where all would share intellectual, menial, and artistic tasks. The shift in ideals from consumption to cultivation would unfold generationally, with children raised in more secure and understanding circumstances while attaining a long-term motivation to learn new skills. In the short term, increased industrial automation would grant individuals more free time to coalesce into groups dedicated to solving problems. These open discussions of innovative alternatives would offer multiple answers to social problems and the means to meaningfully share and practice new ideals.<sup>81</sup>

*Alternative* came to fruition through both individual and collective action. Although Bahro worked alone on the text at night and over weekends, he also sought feedback from a network of SED-critical activists, foremost Rudi Wetzel, who reviewed each completed section and found difficult-to-obtain literature for Bahro’s use.<sup>82</sup> Throughout 1976, the text circulated among the GDR’s party-critical elite, including writers Christa Wolf, Stefan Heym, Heiner Müller, and Ulrich Plenzdorf, as well as philosopher Wolfgang Heise. Due to the

<sup>75</sup> Bahro, *From Red to Green*, 312.

<sup>76</sup> Bahro, *From Red to Green*, 299.

<sup>77</sup> Bahro, *From Red to Green*, 306–07.

<sup>78</sup> Bahro, *From Red to Green*, 408–09.

<sup>79</sup> Bahro, *From Red to Green*, 423–25.

<sup>80</sup> Bahro, *From Red to Green*, 430–34.

<sup>81</sup> Bahro, *From Red to Green*, 326–60.

<sup>82</sup> AGG A (Bahro)/25/8, letter from Bahro to Sergio Segre, January 8, 1980.



informant work of some of Bahro's colleagues and his wife, however, the Stasi also became aware of the text, forcing him to publish by summer 1977.<sup>83</sup> Again, a network of reform socialists made this possible: Rudi Wetzel's acquaintance with economist Fritz Behrens—a key NES adviser and a frequent critic of the SED—facilitated contact with exiled Czech reformer Jiri Kosta; Kosta's brother Tomas, head of an FRG-based publisher, agreed to publish *Alternative*.<sup>84</sup> Swiss musicologist Harry Goldschmidt smuggled the text into the FRG, where it went through three printings within two months and stayed on the bestseller list for six. Still in the GDR, Bahro was duly incarcerated at the Stasi prison at Bautzen, where he learned French, wrote regularly, and circulated handwritten copies of *Alternative* among other political prisoners.<sup>85</sup>

As the popularity of *Alternative* attests, Bahro was hardly alone in his feelings toward the SED or in his support for socialist ideals and East German identity even after his 1979 release. In an April 1980 interview, he declared, "I am through and through a product of this entire communist movement, and therefore a product of the GDR, and I still believe today that the GDR is the better Germany, all in all, regardless of the sharp criticism of the conditions there."<sup>86</sup> Yet the SED's rigid interpretation of Marxism-Leninism meant that critics would not be tolerated and were typically deemed unworthy of living in the GDR despite their professed loyalty. The party's policy was to treat Bahro as a lone wolf, refusing to engage with his work publicly and refraining from arresting his collaborators, including Wetzel.<sup>87</sup> His release came after a long decade of public criticisms from activists committed to socialism but fed up with party practices. The scientist Robert Havemann, a leading SED member and antifascist incarcerated for a time with Honecker, gave a series of lectures condemning the encroachment of Marxism-Leninism in the natural sciences in the 1960s. This led to Havemann's house arrest, which did little to attenuate his acute criticisms through the 1970s. Learning from this experience, the SED later opted to expel its critics to the FRG: Singer Wolf Biermann, a lifelong socialist whose father was murdered at Auschwitz, performed a series of overtly SED-critical songs throughout the early 1970s. After performing in Cologne in 1977, Biermann was refused reentry into the GDR, an act that in turn compelled many leading East German writers and artists to sign a public letter in protest. The party-state's response was to harass the signatories, forcing many to emigrate to the FRG as well.

*Aus meinem Leben* thus took shape at the end of a long decade of internal dissent catalyzed by *Alternative*, and along with celebrations of the GDR's thirtieth anniversary in 1979, was intended to reassert Marxist-Leninist practices in the GDR. A product of the party-state bureaucracy, the book was largely compiled by departments of the SED's Central Committee and researchers from the Institute for Marxism-Leninism (IML). After the initial meeting between publisher Robert Maxwell and Honecker in late October 1979, the project was coordinated by Gerhard Roßmann, the IML department leader for socialist history, and IML director Günter Heyden. In November 1979, Heyden sent a letter to all Central Committee department heads, requesting materials for chapters corresponding to their department functions.<sup>88</sup> In the meantime, Rector Hanna Wolf of the SED's cadre training institute, the Karl Marx Party College, interviewed Honecker for the chapters of his early life and tracked down his articles and work at the International Lenin School.<sup>89</sup> By December, Heyden had received the requested information, allowing subsequent chapters

<sup>83</sup> Herzberg and Seifert, *Rudolf Bahro—Glaube an das Veränderbare*, 133–39.

<sup>84</sup> Herzberg and Seifert, *Rudolf Bahro—Glaube an das Veränderbare*, 142–43. Wetzel negotiated the contract on Bahro's behalf.

<sup>85</sup> Herzberg and Seifert, *Rudolf Bahro—Glaube an das Veränderbare*, 292.

<sup>86</sup> AGG A (Bahro)/18/5, interview with *Ort & Bild* (Sweden), April 2, 1980.

<sup>87</sup> Scholz, *Skandinavische Erfahrungen erwünscht?*, 380.

<sup>88</sup> BArch NY 4167/646, "Über die Beratung mit Beauftragten von Abteilung des ZK...," November 16, 1979.

<sup>89</sup> BArch NY 4167/646, "Über eine Information, die Genosse Gemkow von Genossin Hanna Wolf...," November 19, 1979.

to be completed by IML researchers.<sup>90</sup> On January 7, 1980, Heyden also wrote to Honecker requesting permission to send the director of the Central Party Archive, Heinz Vosske, to West Germany to “further clarify questions” about his family, writings, and past connections to Christian youth groups.<sup>91</sup> By March 1980, the first draft was complete, with the general secretary presented as a subjective (if exemplary) expression of the collective triumph of the German socialist movement through the GDR.

Although a thoroughly utopian book, within and beyond its autobiographical chapters, *Aus meinem Leben* tacitly denied every ideal raised in *Alternative* by claiming it already existed in practice. This was based foremost on the vaunted union of party and people: Honecker and the SED declared themselves “flesh of the flesh of our people, and blood of their blood” and argued that “we have no need to be secretive or to manipulate the masses” given everything from Politburo and Central Committee meetings to the reports of party congresses were available for all to see and participate in. This choreographed popular acclaim extended to Honecker himself. The general secretary highlighted his personal contact with workers, where he found direct evidence that the party’s ideal practice was understood and approved. Asserting that such contacts were “not a formal compulsory exercise,” the “direct exchange of ideas and experiences” during his visits to leading factories appeared to him no different than his exchanges with young people before 1933 and after 1945. Though his presence undoubtedly altered the “advice” being given or “disagreements” presented, Honecker’s interactions with, and seeming approval from, East German workers likely also affirmed his own subjective experience and identity. As a worker’s son he too “was a worker, and have always remained [one] in my innermost heart,” and thus held the authority to speak on their behalf.<sup>92</sup>

These rather self-conscious anecdotes also help illustrate the SED’s basic ideal of a society unified by work toward material growth. “The socialist economy will always be growth-oriented, because our society needs this growth qualitatively and quantitatively in order to be able to realize its social goals,” Honecker argued.<sup>93</sup> As the party identified its legitimacy with the productivity of its workers, growth itself was real existing socialism’s self-measure and teleology. Work in this sense was the practice of socialism, and an individual had to work in the GDR to matter to the SED. Participation in work was thus synonymous with representation in society: Honecker equated “socialist democracy” with the activities of the GDR’s only trade union, the Free German Trade Union Federation (FDGB) and its 8.3 million members. Despite ratifying the Ninth Party Congress platform without amendment, because the FDGB was a formally distinct institution from the SED, in Honecker’s view it meaningfully advocated for its workers vis-à-vis the party-state.<sup>94</sup> The FDGB’s seats in the GDR’s parliament, its formal ability to introduce and amend legislation, as well as the membership of its chairman, Harry Tisch, in the Politburo, ensured that the individual voices of its 8.3 million members were fully represented not only on the workshop floor or office but in the centers of party-state power.<sup>95</sup> “Socialist democracy” thus united working society and the party-state explicitly through the ideal of growth. That anyone might think otherwise was, for the SED, quite unimaginable.

Given Honecker’s expectations of subjective conformity with a specific collective ideal, and the dissonance of this ideal with reality in the GDR, the book was received with praise by the SED leadership and little interest beyond that. Politburo member Hermann Axen, writing to Kurt Hager, praised its “certainty of the superiority and victory of communism,” its valuable contribution to the history of the SED, and how the book “concerns the essential,

<sup>90</sup> These researchers received sliding bonuses for their work. See DY 30/34472, letter from Hager to Heyden, June 13, 1980.

<sup>91</sup> BArch DY 30/34556, letter from Heyden to Honecker, January 7, 1980.

<sup>92</sup> Honecker, *Aus meinem Leben*, 210–12.

<sup>93</sup> Honecker, *Aus meinem Leben*, 249.

<sup>94</sup> Honecker, *Aus meinem Leben*, 355.

<sup>95</sup> Honecker, *Aus meinem Leben*, 354–57.

the universally valid, which has such a strong effect through personal struggle.”<sup>96</sup> After a positive meeting with Maxwell in Oxford, Heyden and Roßmann agreed to proceed with publication. An initial German edition of ten thousand copies would be published by September 1980; Maxwell’s Pergamon Press would handle the English translation, while Dietz would publish within the GDR. Honecker waived all royalties, and the book was priced so that “all who wish to buy it [are] able to afford to do so.”<sup>97</sup> Honecker also received the first copy.<sup>98</sup> *Aus meinem Leben* debuted at a reception in the GDR’s embassy in Bonn on August 25 and hit Dietz presses on September 4.<sup>99</sup> Although printed in millions of copies and ubiquitous in GDR bookstores throughout the 1980s, many remained unsold.<sup>100</sup> Given the GDR’s growing problems of economic decline, pollution, and social apathy in the 1980s, along with rising expulsions and resignations from the SED’s rank and file, the book’s ideal presentation of socialism seemed wholly detached from reality.<sup>101</sup>

In this, *Aus meinem Leben* inadvertently affirmed Bahro’s basic argument about real existing socialism: that the party bureaucracy, drawing both on a Marxist-Leninist logic of practice and that of postwar industrial societies more generally, was interested foremost in economic growth, offering citizens consumer goods in lieu of creative participation in practicing ideals. For Honecker’s SED, the ideal East German worked at maximum productivity and was personally content with the relative material wealth of real existing socialism. Those who drew upon a wider socialist imaginary, or looked beyond it, for new ideals and practices quickly found themselves on the wrong side of *Abgrenzung*. Yet for Bahro, each alienated East German was an opportunity to overcome alienated consumerism and practice socialism’s ethical-spiritual ideals as a new stage of history.

### Conclusion—A Revolution, Unification, and the Affirmation of an Ideal

The two men continued on their separate paths into the 1980s, with Honecker further isolating himself and his party from reform, while Bahro explored new frontiers in environmental activism and spirituality. Although Bahro’s work had limited impact in the FRG, his *Alternative* and its practice of ideals did influence the GDR’s civil movement of the 1980s. This movement eventually forced Honecker’s resignation as general secretary in 1989 and initiated a social revolution that concluded only with unification in 1990. Yet the end of the GDR, and socialist practice on German soil, brought the two together to face what remained of its ideals.

As Bahro developed his antigrowth ideals, he attempted to synthesize local communalism and environmentalism with the spiritualism touched upon briefly in *Alternative*. Once in the FRG, Bahro joined the West German Greens and sought to unite socialist and environmentalist ideals under one political program. Although he made little headway in uniting the two groups, he did gain influential friends, including British historian E. P. Thompson. Bahro, in turn, proselytized Thompson’s thesis that the “exterminism” of unsustainable consumption of resources was humanity’s greatest challenge.<sup>102</sup> In a speech presented at the Seventh World Conference on Future Studies in Stockholm in June 1982, Bahro condemned traditional Marxism as equally exterminist as capitalism and called on fellow activists and “hippies, alternative people, job-sharers, etc.” to stop participating in the production-

<sup>96</sup> BArch DY 30/IV B 2/2.024/119/51, letter from Axen to Hager, March 13, 1980.

<sup>97</sup> BArch NY 4167/647, letter from Maxwell to Hennig, April 11, 1980.

<sup>98</sup> BArch DY 30/16198, letter from Hennig to Honecker, September 4, 1980.

<sup>99</sup> BArch DY 30/16201, letter from Maxwell to “the director—institute of Marxism and Leninism,” August 14, 1980.

<sup>100</sup> Catherine Epstein attests to the book’s ubiquity in GDR bookstores. See Catherine Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries: German Communists and their Century*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 202.

<sup>101</sup> Thomas Klein et al., *Visionen: Repression und Opposition in der SED (1949–1989)*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt/Oder: Frankfurter Oder Editionen, 1996), 114–21.

<sup>102</sup> Rudolf Bahro, *Socialism and Survival: Articles, Essays and Talks 1979–1982* (London: Heretic Books, 1982). For Thompson’s work on exterminism, see E. P. Thompson, *Exterminism and Cold War* (London: New Left Books, 1982).

consumption cycle.<sup>103</sup> Following a rupture with his fellow Greens seeking to stand in parliamentary elections, Bahro left the party in 1985, dedicating his time to meditation seminars and a new book. This work, *Logik der Rettung* (*The Logic of Salvation*), largely dispensed with his reliance on Marxist categories and materialism, emphasizing instead the subjective spiritual transformations necessary to build a sustainable future society. Yet *Logik* met with little of the fanfare of *Alternative*, and Bahro concerned himself with self-improvement and “ecospiritual” pursuits, until the revolution of 1989 returned him to his former country.<sup>104</sup>

In the meantime, real existing socialism led to a stalemate between a sclerotic SED leadership and a growing civil movement demanding reform. Honecker’s shift away from NES-era industrial investment to consumer goods production left the GDR’s productive capacity falling behind even replacement rates, leading to a gradual decay that in turn undermined prospects for the GDR’s long-term growth.<sup>105</sup> Rather than address these issues, Honecker ignored adverse economic data, cut working hours, and in a supreme twist of irony, took out loans from the FRG to pay for his social welfare program.<sup>106</sup> Honecker also had to contend with new civil groups based in the Protestant Church, whose transnational, antimilitarist, and anti-consumerist ideals challenged real existing socialism’s ideals of class struggle, *Abgrenzung*, and unrestrained growth. Although environmental groups were initially willing to work with the party-state, requesting dialogue and access to environmental information, the SED responded by classifying such data in 1982 and increasing Stasi surveillance.<sup>107</sup> The party’s action had an unintended effect, however, forcing these groups to collaborate on gathering and sharing environmental data, working out local solutions, and focusing their demands to the state via collective petitions. Although infiltrated by Stasi informants, these groups also brought together Christians, liberals, anarchists, and socialists in a space of open dialogue dedicated to working out solutions to East Germany’s daunting problems. Environmental and peace activists even founded their own library, the *Umweltbibliothek* (Environmental Library; UB) in the basement of Berlin’s Zionskirche in 1986 to provide access to rare and officially prohibited texts and to be used as a site for activism. These church groups exemplified Bahro’s vision of local groups discussing novel solutions and demanding that the party take action or cease standing in the way of progress.

Bahro’s work also had a direct effect on the ideals and practices of civil activists in the 1980s. Though *Alternative* was banned in the GDR, copies were smuggled in via West Berlin and circulated among activist groups, where it stood as the first systemic vision of alternative activism in the GDR.<sup>108</sup> Although peace and environmental groups did not share its vision of communism, UB activists did request a copy of *Alternative* from their West German Green partners for inclusion in their library.<sup>109</sup> Critical SED members drew upon the text as well, from East German diplomat Hermann von Berg’s anonymously published “Manifesto of the League of German Communists” in 1978 to an abortive discussion of

<sup>103</sup> AGG A (Bahro)/25/8 (2 of 3), “Who can stop the apocalypse? Or the task, substance and strategy of the social movements,” IFDA dossier 34, March/April 1983.

<sup>104</sup> Rudolf Bahro, *Logik der Rettung* (Stuttgart: Edition Weitbrecht, 1987). For an account of the text, see Herzberg and Seifert, *Rudolf Bahro—Glaube an das Veränderbare*, 409–21; for his efforts to build an ecospiritual commune in 1987–1989, 436–47.

<sup>105</sup> Raymond G. Stokes, *Constructing Socialism: Technology and Change in East Germany 1945–1990* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 153–54.

<sup>106</sup> Mark Allinson, “More from Less: Ideological Gambling with the Unity of Economic and Social Policy in Honecker’s GDR,” *Central European History* 45, no. 1 (2012): 102–27. See also Andre Steiner, *The Plans that Failed: An Economic History of the GDR* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010).

<sup>107</sup> BArch DC 20-1/4/5063, “Anordnung zur Gewinnung oder Bearbeitung und Schutz von Informationen...,” November 16, 82, 203–11; and “Information über Probleme des Geheimnisschutzes...,” November 8, 1982, 140.

<sup>108</sup> Ehrhart Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR 1949–1989* (Berlin: Christopher Links Verlag, 1998), 343.

<sup>109</sup> Robert-Havemann-Gesellschaft (RGH) OWK 07, “Bücherliste für uns,” 1987, 26–31.

Stalinism at the Friedrichsfelde Peace Circle in Berlin in November 1988.<sup>110</sup> Yet teacher and activist Tina Krone's path to the text most clearly highlighted Bahro's intent in writing it. Krone later explained that although she grew up rejecting the SED, like Bahro she found Marxism's emancipatory "theory of history" to be "very impressive." Desiring a world of subjective and communal fulfillment, "where everyone can live together in love and peace," Krone came upon *Alternative* in her first year of teaching. In it she found a "utopia" from which to explain the world and a fitting practice for future political conflicts. It also led her to the groups Women for Peace and the Friedrichsfelde Peace Circle, whose members vigorously debated the book in chapter-by-chapter readings.<sup>111</sup>

These efforts flowered in the final year of the GDR, which saw the end of real existing socialism, and a brief but fevered practice of local activism and mass democracy until the institution of liberal capitalism in the East. Ironically, Honecker and Bahro played only small roles in this revolution and in a sense were left behind by it. By summer 1989, the economic and environmental effects of Honecker's policies compelled thousands of GDR citizens to flee the GDR through the newly opened border between Hungary and Austria. This crisis was followed by mass protests in September and the emergence of civil groups composed of church activists demanding dialogue and reform. In response, by October Honecker was forced to resign as general secretary by his own Politburo. In his final speech to the Central Committee, Honecker maintained that the GDR stood as "the culmination of the struggle of our Party and my own activity as a communist."<sup>112</sup> Yet that culmination looked less impressive by the day: beyond mass emigrations and protests, nearly half of the SED's 2.3 million members resigned by the end of 1989.<sup>113</sup> In December, the SED convened an extraordinary party congress to contend with these crises. Though no longer an SED member, Bahro was invited to the Congress and addressed his former colleagues as a fellow GDR citizen.<sup>114</sup> He called again for an antigrowth alternative, albeit now to West German capitalism: "The village would reunite the community," Bahro declared, arguing that a return to the land would lead to the GDR's ecological and spiritual renewal.<sup>115</sup> Yet preoccupied with staving off unification and its own political irrelevance, the renamed Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) would not adopt Bahro's agrarian communitarianism. The PDS failed to gain a majority in the parliamentary elections of March 18, 1990, and within the year the GDR would cease to exist. Bahro would play no role in the PDS, instead he founded an ecological working group at Humboldt University and continued his writing. After serving nearly six months in jail awaiting trial, during which he and Bahro shared their first and last correspondence affirming the GDR's socialist ideals, the Berlin district court dropped its case against Honecker, who went into exile in Chile before dying of liver cancer in 1994. Bahro died of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in 1997.<sup>116</sup>

What bound Bahro and Honecker, drove them apart, and brought them together again was a shared socialist imaginary, ideals of socialist equality and antifascism, and the GDR. Yet their disagreements in practice centered upon the dialectical progress of history itself:

<sup>110</sup> A "Stalinism seminar" planned for November 1988 was canceled due to the arrest of its coorganizers, including Thomas Klein. See Klein's proposed essay in RHG SWV 05, "Die Bedeutung der Stalin-Frage für eine Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie des Sozialismus," 1988, 2–17.

<sup>111</sup> Herzberg and Seifert, *Rudolf Bahro—Glaube an das Veränderbare*, 237–38.

<sup>112</sup> Zeno and Sabine Zimmerling, ed., *Neue Chronik DDR*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Verlag Tribüne, 1990), 138–39.

<sup>113</sup> Franz Oswald, *The Party that Came Out of the Cold War: The Party of Democratic Socialism in United Germany* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 3.

<sup>114</sup> Bahro had been stripped of his GDR citizenship after emigrating. It was restored December 11, 1989. See AGG A (Bahro)/100/40,, "Urkunde ..." December 11, 1989.

<sup>115</sup> Lothar Hornbogen, Detlef Nakath and Gerd-Rüdiger Stephan, eds *Außerordentlicher Parteitag der SED/PDS. Protokoll der Beratungen am 8/9. und 16/17. Dezember 1989 in Berlin* (Berlin: Karl Dietz, 1999), 255. Bahro's speech can be heard on a CD included in the book.

<sup>116</sup> Rumors that Bahro's cancer was caused by irradiation by the Stasi during his imprisonment have not been supported by archival evidence. Bahro had been in declining health since 1994 and believed his illness was due to his wife's suicide in 1993. See Herzberg and Seifert, *Rudolf Bahro—Glaube an das Veränderbare*, 584.



forged in the prewar KPD, the steel mills of Magnitogorsk, and long years of Nazi imprisonment, Honecker's rigid and limited Marxism-Leninism was unable to change with the society it eventually led. For Honecker, no further development was necessary, and for this he lost his power and his country. Although Bahro's alternative did not dialectically sublimate real existing socialism, it inspired others to initiate that process when the SED refused to do so. Regardless, both men, and the activists they inspired, were driven by utopian ideals larger than themselves: *Aus meinem Leben* depicted a society equally utopian as that of *Die Alternative*. Though in the context of the entwined subjectivities and common imaginary of their authors, the ideals they conveyed also shaped the lives of millions for much of the twentieth century.

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